

Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce
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The economic and community advantages of beginning the school year after Labor Day in Muskegon County.

As the number of manufacturing jobs in our community continues to decline, it is time to look at the benefits to our families and the community when considering beginning the school year after Labor Day. In recent years the tourism industry has become a significant driver of our local economy. Recognizing that fact, we must look for ways to adapt our current behaviors to create a business climate that supports economic stability in the future.

With the growth and development of the Lake Express Ferry service to Milwaukee, annual festivals, Michigan's Adventure, hotels, restaurants, our nationally recognized beaches and other arts, entertainment and historical attractions, the number of people traveling to Muskegon well surpasses 1.7 million visitors per year.

The Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce and the Muskegon County Convention and Visitor's Bureau projects the number of visitors will continue to grow, pumping millions of dollars into our local economy. The tourism industry is a significant employer, and its employment and investments reach well beyond hospitality businesses and tourist attractions. The tourism industry increases the local demand for transportation related products, clothing, health services, food, sports and recreational equipment and more.

There is however, a problem with servicing the end of the summer traveler. Mid July to August is the peak travel season because of the warm weather conditions and school vacation calendar. Unfortunately, the school pre-labor day start date alters summer vacation and employment plans. This creates a workforce shortage. Many of the tourism employees are college and high school students, who have embarked on their first professional work experience. Tourism businesses are dependent on these talented students to keep their operations running. When the students go back to school, tourism businesses close, leaving millions of dollars in sales income, wages and tax dollars unspent in our community.

Pertaining to aspect of family, research shows a later start date does not have a negative impact on student performance. Many families enjoy the last days of summer as tourists in their own community. And a summer job for a student is an educational opportunity in and of itself, teaching responsibility, problem solving, critical thinking, utilization of math and writing skills etc.

Not to be overlooked is the benefit for education statewide when anticipating the additional increase in sales tax collection during this time period. In all cases where educational facilities utilize air conditioning, it can have a positive effect on school utilities bills, lowering energy costs.

It is the position of the Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce the time has come to look critically at the community efforts to recognize the tourism industry as a critical strategy for economic growth. The Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce, representing 1,270 members supports the option of prolonging the tourism season until after Labor Day. This course of action would increase the desperately needed income and tax dollars for the entire community.

In an effort to support the growth of business and prosperity for citizens of our community, we are proposing Michigan schools consider voluntarily beginning the school year after the Labor Day.